

**when you need a place to run to, i got you by
jibberjabber599**

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Summary:

Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers, learning how to be friends.

when you need a place to run to, i got you

Author's Note:

these two and their blossoming friendship (and yeah, their developing romantic feelings) are everything. i don't care how cliché they are, i'm here for it. forgive any and all grammatical mistakes.

She still doesn't like to close her eyes when she slips under her covers. Every sound seems to be heightened in the dead of night, and even though she knows everything's okay now (as okay as things will ever be, now), she startles at every sound from outside her window.

She's never sure when exactly she falls into a restless slumber, but she always wakes up feeling exhausted. Some nights she has nightmares of being stuck in that place again, and she wakes up with her pajamas clinging to her skin, covered in a cold sweat. Her mom never fails to ask if she's okay during breakfast and the only thing that keeps her from blowing up is that Mike's asked the same question.

No, I'm not okay, she wants to yell. I went into that place; I lost my best friend, and can't stop thinking about it. But she's found it's easier to smile and say she's fine. She can always tell that Steve wants to ask her the same thing, but thankfully he knows not to push her to talk.

They don't talk about nightmares, or that day. It hasn't even been a full week, yet somehow everyone is managing to pretend nothing ever happened pretty well—with the exception of the local newspaper having a field day over Will Byers being alive. So she goes through the motions, pretends Barb's empty desk doesn't make her want to have a breakdown in homeroom, and finds herself insanely wishing she could fight the monster again.

She thinks of Jonathan as her teacher drones on, wonders if he's back at school. Will was still recuperating in the hospital, and Jonathan had skipped several days just to be by his side. She thinks about how he'd been able to sleep that horrible night while she'd been wide

awake, how she knows she would have felt even more terrified had he not stayed with her.

She asks Mike for the Byers' phone number after dinner when her mom is preoccupied with Holly, and he recites it with this smug little look that makes her roll her eyes.

"It's *not* like that, Mike, I've told you that already," she insists as she writes Jonathan's name above the number.

"You know you could go over there," Mike suggests. "A lot of people have been over to help fix their house."

"This is good, thanks," she says, looking at the paper in her hand.

She promises herself that she'll only call if she has a nightmare or she can't sleep. But then, that makes calling inevitable.

The first time she gathers the courage to dial his number, it's with shaky fingers (which is frankly silly since she's held and shot a gun and fought a monster with Jonathan Byers, so what's a phone call at one o'clock in the morning?). The phone's cradled on her shoulder and paper clutched in her free hand when a sleepy female voice answers after the fifth ring. "Hello?"

She should have expected Joyce Byers would be the one to pick up the phone. But she didn't plan this out very well, clearly.

"Hello?" Joyce repeats, sounding more awake now, a bit anxious and upset. "Lonnie, is this you? Stop calling, ok—"

"Mrs. Byers," she interrupts, clearing her throat when her voice comes out hoarse. "It's Nancy Wheeler."

"Nancy," Joyce seems shocked, and there's a long drawn out pause before she speaks again. "Are you okay?"

"I really shouldn't have called," she blurts out instead of answering the question, wanting to hang up as quickly as possible without seeming rude.

"...did you want to talk to Jonathan?"

She fumbles for a response, settling for a hesitant, "Would that be okay?"

"He's right here; I'm going to hand the phone over."

There's another pause as the phone is passed, then she hears his voice. "Nancy?" His voice is groggy, like it'd been when he'd woken up that morning in her bed.

"Uh, I'm really sorry for calling at this time of night. Or morning, I guess," she says, wondering if she sounds as frazzled as her nerves. She feels more nervous than she did the first time Steve asked her out, which is mind-boggling.

"It's okay. Are you? Okay, I mean."

"Yeah, I just couldn't sleep."

By the third time, she no longer needs the piece of paper, having his number memorized. It's only nine o'clock when she calls this time, and she'd been studying her flashcards with the music playing when a song she remembered Barb humming along to came on. She'd turned the music off immediately, the urge to cry taking over.

"It's just...bullshit," she says into the phone, more upset with herself than anything.

"I think it's normal to feel that way, to be angry and sad," Jonathan tells her, and it's almost verbatim what her mom has told her and Mike. "It doesn't make you weak."

“Right,” she laughs dryly, “But that’s how I feel.”

“I cried over Will several times, even after he was safe in a hospital bed.”

“It’s not crying that bothers me, it’s that I wasn’t able to save her,” she admits softly. “It’s...guilt.”

“What happened isn’t your fault,” is all he says, and it doesn’t magically make her feel better but it’s nice to hear nonetheless. “You were the one who never stopped looking for her,” he continues when she doesn’t say anything. “You never gave up.”

The sixth night she calls, he answers immediately after the first ring.

“You weren’t waiting by the phone, were you?” she teases, instantly regretting how ridiculously flirty it comes off.

“No,” he denies. “Well, technically yes. But only because the phone’s next to my bed.”

“You finally got a phone in your room?”

“Yeah, well, it’s an early Christmas present. I think Mom was tired of the ringing waking her up at night,” and she knows he’s not serious, but she feels a pang of embarrassment. “That was a joke, by the way,” he rushes to clarify. “She doesn’t mind you calling.”

“And do you?” she asks, cringing at how unsure she sounds.

“No, no, I don’t mind,” he answers. “We’re kind of...friends, right?”

“Yeah,” she replies instantly and without even thinking about it, and finds it’s true.

It doesn't become a habit—the phone calls.

She doesn't call *every* night. They see each other at school when Jonathan comes back and make casual small talk, but he never brings them up. She goes over to the Byers' with her mom at Thanksgiving to give them a casserole and let Mike visit with Will, and she sits with Jonathan on the couch in the newly renovated living room and makes more casual small talk while in plain view of their mothers.

So, it's totally not a big deal--the calls and them being friends now.

So what if they now know small, insignificant details about each other—like how he loves Bowie, she loves Tom Cruise, and their favorite colors? Friends know those sort of things.

("Gray or brown.' Really?" she'd laughed.

"What? They're nice, neutral colors."

"I guess I thought you would like a more exciting color," she'd teased. "Aren't you gonna ask what mine is?"

"I don't have to. It's blue," and his response had been said with such sureness that she'd felt like denying it out of spite. "Like, everything in your room was blue, so it has to be blue," he'd reiterated.)

It's strange though, this new friendship. Jonathan Byers has been in her life for as long as she could remember. Once their brothers became best friends, he'd be in her life more.

But he'd never actually been a *part* of her life.

She had always thought he was a little weird because he was so quiet and isolated. Even when she thinks back to him as a kid in elementary school, he'd kept to himself. He'd gotten a camera for his birthday one year and that had become his companion.

Something about Jonathan had always made him appear older than his peers, and it was never a secret that the Byers' home life wasn't exactly idyllic. When she came across him being bullied at school a

few times growing up, she'd felt the urge to intervene on principle but knew it would likely do more harm than good for the both of them. She'd been a step away from being bullied herself at one point, a disadvantage to being the known as "the smartest girl in class."

She recalls how once, when she was in middle school and still willing to take part in Mike's games with his friends, her mom had asked why they never included Jonathan.

Her preteen self had balked at the idea of Jonathan playing with them. Jonathan's not mean or anything, she'd told her mom, he just doesn't want to play. And by the time she'd entered high school, hanging out with Jonathan Byers was the last thing on her mind.

Looking back, she wishes she'd invited him to play with their brothers. If he'd declined, she could have dragged him along anyway.

Steve doesn't know about the phone calls, but he does tag along when she talks to Jonathan briefly in the hallways at school. Steve and Jonathan both make an effort to be friendly, and watching them awkwardly navigate a simple conversation is something she'd never imagined she'd see.

"He needs a friend," she tells Steve one day as he's driving her home. "Not like I'm friends with him because I think he's a charity-case or something. Just, he needs a friend and I need one, too."

"I get it," Steve replies. "You're good for each other right now."

She doesn't want to examine how that statement makes her feel too closely, but oddly enough, she feels a little guilty. "Yeah, we are," she agrees softly as she looks at him from the passenger's side.

Steve ends up helping her buy the camera. It's mostly because she can't afford a nice one alone and partially because he really does want a clean slate with Jonathan.

"Don't let him know when you give it to him, though," he instructs as she wraps it up, and she rolls her eyes. "I'm serious Nancy, don't tell

him.”

“Why?” she laughs at how adamant he is, taping up the edges. “You do realize if he doesn’t know you helped that you’re not actually apologizing, right? Besides, making amends is kind of lame when you use a third party.”

“You’re not exactly a third party in this case, though,” Steve points out, and she can still make out the discoloration of his healing bruise from the fight.

“No, I guess not.”

Steve dangles mistletoe above their heads before he leaves on Christmas Eve, and she mumbles, “You’re such an idiot,” into their kiss.

“I saw that kiss,” her mom brings up later when she’s helping her clean the kitchen and put away the leftovers. She’s about to defend herself when her mom says, “I’m talking about Jonathan.”

It’s not like that, is on the tip of her tongue. But she’s used that one before, and her mom’s admittedly not *that* naïve. “He’s my friend,” is what she says instead, unable to look her mom in the eye.

“You’re sixteen, Nancy. It’s okay to not know exactly how you feel,” is all her mom says on the subject.

She doesn’t call Jonathan that night, but finds herself hoping he’ll call to tell her he liked the camera.

Her phone never rings.

The day school’s back in session after Christmas break, her classes seem to pass by slowly, but she’s grateful for the distraction and

structure school always gives her. She tells Steve that by her locker at the end of the day, and he chuckles.

“What?”

“Only you,” he replies affectionately. He’s leaning down for a kiss when she sees Jonathan down the hallway, and she steps back.

“Sorry,” she apologizes instantly, “I saw Jonathan and I want to catch him before he leaves. Ask him about the camera,” she explains, but they’re both aware she had numerous chances to ask him if he’d liked it when he’d picked Will up from her house during break. Only she’d stayed upstairs in her room all those times, telling herself if Jonathan wanted to talk to her that badly he’d call or come up. He hadn’t done either.

“Yeah, okay. I’ll meet you outside.”

She finds him in the darkroom, shutting the door quietly behind her. “So I’m guessing you like the camera?” She moves over to him carefully as her eyes adjust.

“Yeah,” he laughs, looking at her with a small smile. “I feel like I took a million pictures. It was like once I started, I couldn’t stop.”

She spots a photograph of Will and his mom, both grinning at each other as Will opened a gift.

“These are so nice, Jonathan,” she comments as she examines a few more hanging up. “I’m so glad Will is back and safe.”

“Me too,” he agrees, chewing on his thumbnail in what she’s come to recognize as a nervous gesture. She catches a glimpse of the scar on his left palm, wonders if she traced it if it’d feel the same as her matching one. “You, uh,” he starts, looking a bit unsure in the red light. “You didn’t have any nightmares?”

She knows what he’s really asking, and briefly considers lying and saying she definitely wasn’t avoiding him and her holiday had been nightmare-free. But they’re friends now, she reminds herself. “No, I had a few,” she confesses. “Not as frequent, though. I guess I wanted to see if I could handle them on my own.” Which is somewhat the

truth.

He nods in reply, beginning to gather up some of the photos. "And it goes both ways," she says, keeping her tone light. "You know you can call me, right? Friends do call each other."

She expects him to counter with a promise to call her sometime, but he doesn't. "You know, I almost made you a mixtape. To thank you for the camera."

She doesn't know how to respond to the abrupt change of subject, and he refuses to look up from his photographs.

"But, I realized we've never talked about what music *you* liked," he says when finally looks up at her, grinning.

"I need new music anyway," she shrugs with a smile, making her way to the door. "Talk to you later."

When her phone rings that night, she knows who it is before she picks it up.